



*The Benson scrapbook contains many pages carefully illustrated with photos, magazine ads and other material that capture the flavor of the day.*

# Pages from a Hunter's Scrapbook

By Craig Bihle

On October 21, 1933, Arnold H. Benson walked into The Barrett Company hardware store in Lakota, North Dakota and bought two boxes of Winchester Speed Load 12 gauge shotgun shells. He paid – or rather, put on account – \$2.20.

We know this because Arnold Benson saved the box top from the shells. He also saved the charge slip from the Barrett store, which bore this not-so-subtle reminder of the difficult, Depression era times in which most Americans lived:

## SATURDAY OF NEXT WEEK IS PAY DAY ON THIS SLIP

UNTIL NORMAL TIMES RETURN WE ARE OBLIGED  
TO REMAIN ON THIS RESTRICTED CASH BASIS  
THE BARRETT CO.

A week later, Arnold used one of those Speed Loads to down a bluebill, one of only two ducks he shot that hunting season, as it tried to cross a road grade at Markley's Bay on Nelson County's Stump Lake. "SOME duck hunting this season," he mused, rather sarcastically, in his journal entry for October 29, 1933.

The Benson larder, however, was not empty by any means. Earlier that fall, Arnold bagged 29 prairie chickens, 11 sharp-tailed grouse and a number of Chinese ringnecks during North Dakota's third pheasant season ever.

Arnold Benson kept track of his hunting and fishing forays starting in that 1933 season, when he was 29 years old. While keeping a journal is not an unusual pastime, Benson's account of his outdoor adventures became much more than pages of handwritten notes. His writings are not only neatly typed, but also artistically arranged and enhanced by photos and other mementos of the day, such as charge slips, pictures cut out from magazines, old licenses, bird feathers, stamps and personal letters.

To open this scrapbook is to take a visual and written journey back to a time when pheasant hunting was in its infancy in North



*Arnold Benson in 1935, the fifth year North Dakota had a pheasant season.*

Dakota; when ducks and deer were scarce, and prairie chickens were still plentiful.

"When I saw it," says Mark Resner, a Mott, North Dakota resident and avid hunter and collector, "I was just fascinated by it."

Resner came across the scrapbook a few years ago at the Dakota Midwest Flea Market in Mandan. It had apparently been sold at an auction, along with other family possessions, some time after Arnold Benson passed away in 1990 and his wife, Evelyn, moved to a Bismarck care center (Evelyn died in 2003). Arnold and Evelyn were married in 1940 but did not have any children to whom they could pass along their possessions.

Resner bought the scrapbook, thinking that maybe someday he would publish the whole thing so other hunters could experience the same sense of fascination he feels every time he pages through the three-ring binder.



He still might do that, but in the interim and on the occasion of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 75th anniversary, Resner offered *North Dakota OUT-DOORS* the opportunity to feature the scrapbook in a story. The only downside to that offer is that space limitations don't allow us to publish more.

In the accompanying pages you'll read many excerpts from Arnold Benson's journal that capture the flavor of what hunting was like in the 1930s and beyond. Images of several pages illustrate the care and creativity that went into developing the scrapbook.

We know that Arnold moved from Lakota to Ellendale to Watford City to Williston during the 18 years covered in the scrapbook. We learned from his obituary that ran in the Bismarck Tribune in October, 1990, that he worked for the Farmers Home Administration, and he and Evelyn moved to Bismarck in 1961.

We don't know how much of the scrapbook was put together as it happened, or if it was – like most scrapbooks – put together later. We do know from a couple of references that Arnold did take pictures and save things like shell boxes with the intent of including them in a scrapbook.

We don't know if Arnold – or Evelyn – typed the text and recreated the many licenses that enhance the stories, or if somewhere out there, in Arnold Benson's near-perfect longhand, is a hand-written journal that also contains the excerpts that follow ....

#### July Fourth, 1933

Fifty years ago to-day Great Northern train No. 1, the "William Crooks," pulled into Devils Lake, the first train to arrive in that town. There were several oldtimers from here who made the trip, including George L. Barrett (proprietor of the Barrett Company store, who died September 22, 1933). The same train made that run this morning in honor of the Fiftieth anniversary celebration at the Lake, returning towards evening.

Mr. Barrett was very much interested and decorated the store window, displaying relics of the early days. Included in the display was my collection of Indian relics, and my old 40-60 Winchester was hung on an oxen yoke in the center of the window. Beneath the rifle was a card which read:

40-60 Winchester rifle  
Designed for Buffalo Hunting,  
in Use for Fifty Years.  
Now Owned by  
Arnold H. Benson

That was stretching it a little, I think, as the 40-60 appears to me to be too light for running Buff. Anyhow, the buffalo were practically extinct in this part of the country at that time.

#### Thursday, September 21, 1933

The season on ducks opened to-day but there are very few in the country and I don't think they're fit to eat, either. Practically all the sloughs are dry, including the Black slough.



### Thursday Evening, October 12, 1933

Well, the season for hunting chickens is over; the most successful one that we've ever enjoyed. The three of us – Arv, Art (brothers) and I went out this afternoon and brought in eight prairie chickens.

... During the season just closed we bagged 72 chickens and 16 sharp-tailed grouse. I shot 29 chickens and 11 grouse, besides the Huns. Art shot a combination of 37 birds and 11 were bagged by Arvid.

### Thursday, October 19, 1933

... I rolled out at 4 this morning, dressed hurriedly and went out to have a look at the weather. The air was frosty, but clear and still and an inch or so of snow blanketed the ground. Shortly after 5 the three of us left (Lakota) in Arv's Chevrolet, bound for Dickey County to spend the day afield with ringnecks.

The roads were in bad condition and became worse as the sun climbed higher and began melting the snow. The road conditions began to improve in the southern part of Barnes County, getting better the farther south we went. We arrived in Dickey County about 9 – cheerful and optimistic. Here it was warm and balmy and the ground perfectly dry; not a drop of rain had fallen here last night.

*Note: This entry illustrates Arnold Benson's passion for hunting. At a time when roads weren't all that great and vehicles weren't all that dependable on long trips, this was Arnold's second trip from Lakota to Dickey County, a distance of more than 150 miles one way, in less than a week. And on each trip, after securing a limit of pheasants, they returned home back to Lakota the same day.*

### Friday, August 31, 1934

Bought a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp. First one (sold) in Nelson County. (1934 was the first year the federal duck stamp was in existence.)

### Saturday, September 22, 1934

Opening Day, 1934 Hunting Season. A dark, chilly day. Arvid and I took the afternoon off and went out about one o'clock – the season opening at noon. Bob also came along. We covered all of our favorite chicken cover north, west and southwest of here and never flushed a bird. I'm afraid we're going to have a poor season because of the terrible drouth this year.

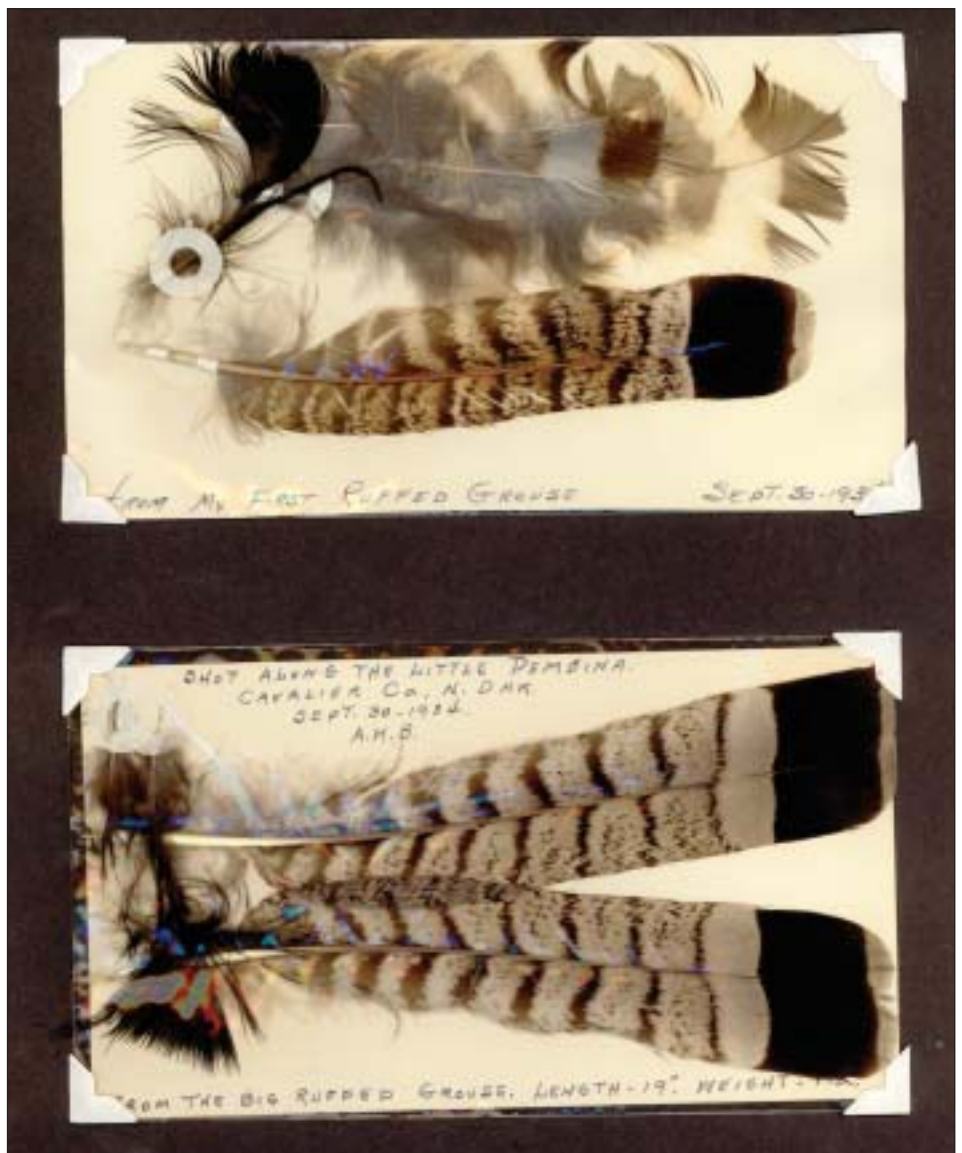


### Friday, October 6, 1934

In spite of poor visibility due to a severe dust storm, I went out scouting for ducks late in the afternoon.

### Tuesday, October 15, 1935

Elvin Nelson and I sneaked away late this afternoon and shot three chickens and a pheasant northeast of Mapes. Very windy and dusty, and altogether disagreeable for upland shooting.





## Arnold Benson Gets Hunting Permit No. 1

Hunting Licenses Received By Auditor Peter Jorgenson; Chicken Season Opens Sept. 22

Hunting licenses for the season of 1934 have been received by County Auditor Peter Jorgenson, and the first permit to be issued was sold to Arnold H. Benson of Lakota, No. 2 was purchased by Albert Hanson of Pekin. The resident hunting licenses sell for \$1.50, and those who wish to hunt ducks are also required to purchase a \$1 federal "duck stamp" at the postoffice.

The season on ducks and other migratory waterfowl opens at 12 noon October 3 and continues to sunset November 11, with hunting prohibited on Monday and Tuesday of each week. There will be no open season on quail, sage grouse, doves, swans, cranes, plover, wood duck, buffle-headed duck, Ross geese, cackling geese and curlews.

Following is the summary of season and bag limits for other fowl this year:

Pinnated grouse (prairie chicken) and sharp-tailed grouse: 12 noon September 22 to sunset October 1; daily bag limit, five; possession limit, 10.

Ruffed grouse (partridge): Noon September 28 to sunset October 1; Bottineau, Rolette, Pembina and Gavallier counties; bag limit, five; possession limit, 10.

Chinese or ring-neck pheasant: 12 noon to sunset daily, October 20 to 26, except no hunting permitted on Monday and Tuesday; season open only in Richland, Ransom, Sargent, Dickey, LaMoure, Kidder, McIntosh, Stutsman, Emmons, Burleigh, Morton, Stark, Dunn, Cass, Barnes, Adams, Hettinger, Oliver, McLean, Grant and Mercer counties; bag limit, three cocks; possession limit, six.

Additional pheasant season: Sunrise October 27 to sunset November 2; only in Richland, Ransom, Sargent, Dickey and LaMoure counties; bag limit, five, of which two may be hens; possession limit, 10, of which four may be hens; no hunting on Monday and Tuesday.

Hungarian partridge: Noon October 6 to sunset October 7; season open only in Divide, Burke, Renville, Bottineau and Rolette counties and those parts of Williams, Mountrail, Ward, McHenry and Pierce counties north of the Great Northern main line; bag limit, three; possession limit, six.



ED



ARN



**Thursday, October 17, 1935**

Ervin and I went out in the Whippet (a vehicle) this afternoon. We didn't anticipate much shooting as the wind and dust are still with us ... Upon our arrival in town about supper we learned that the exchange at Aneta had been robbed. Had we stayed in town we might have had some bigger game to hunt!

**Friday, September 11, 1936**

Bought my duck stamp today but I suppose that I won't do any duck hunting. For the third time I bought the first stamp here.

**Friday, October 16, 1936**

It was so chilly in the office that I took a ride in the Whippet and shot a couple of partridges southwest of the Center church.

**Sunday, November 8, 1936**

Last day of waterfowl season, which doesn't mean anything. No water. No ducks.

**Tuesday, October 1, 1940**

(By this time Arnold had moved from Lakota to Ellendale)

Opening day of hunting season. I went out alone in the morning and shot 3 pheasants and 2 Huns. Grassed a partridge with the first shot fired. Ev (Evelyn, future wife) went out after school, and hunted until 5 o'clock along the State line. We brought in seven more pheasants.

**Tuesday, October 8, 1940**

Made farm calls this afternoon and took the Winchester along. On my return trip towards 5 o'clock I shot 4 cock pheasants and a hen (hens were legal to shoot at the time). I don't think I've ever seen so many pheasants – I could have shot several limits as there were any number along the roads, mostly large coveys and quite tame.

**Monday, October 21, 1940**

Chris Sorensen is back in town for a day or two and since this is the last day of the upland season we decided to go hunting this afternoon ...

... We drove over to Lake Tewaukon in Sargent County. There were thousands of ducks feeding around there and we got a couple of shots at a flock, knocking down two which we couldn't find.

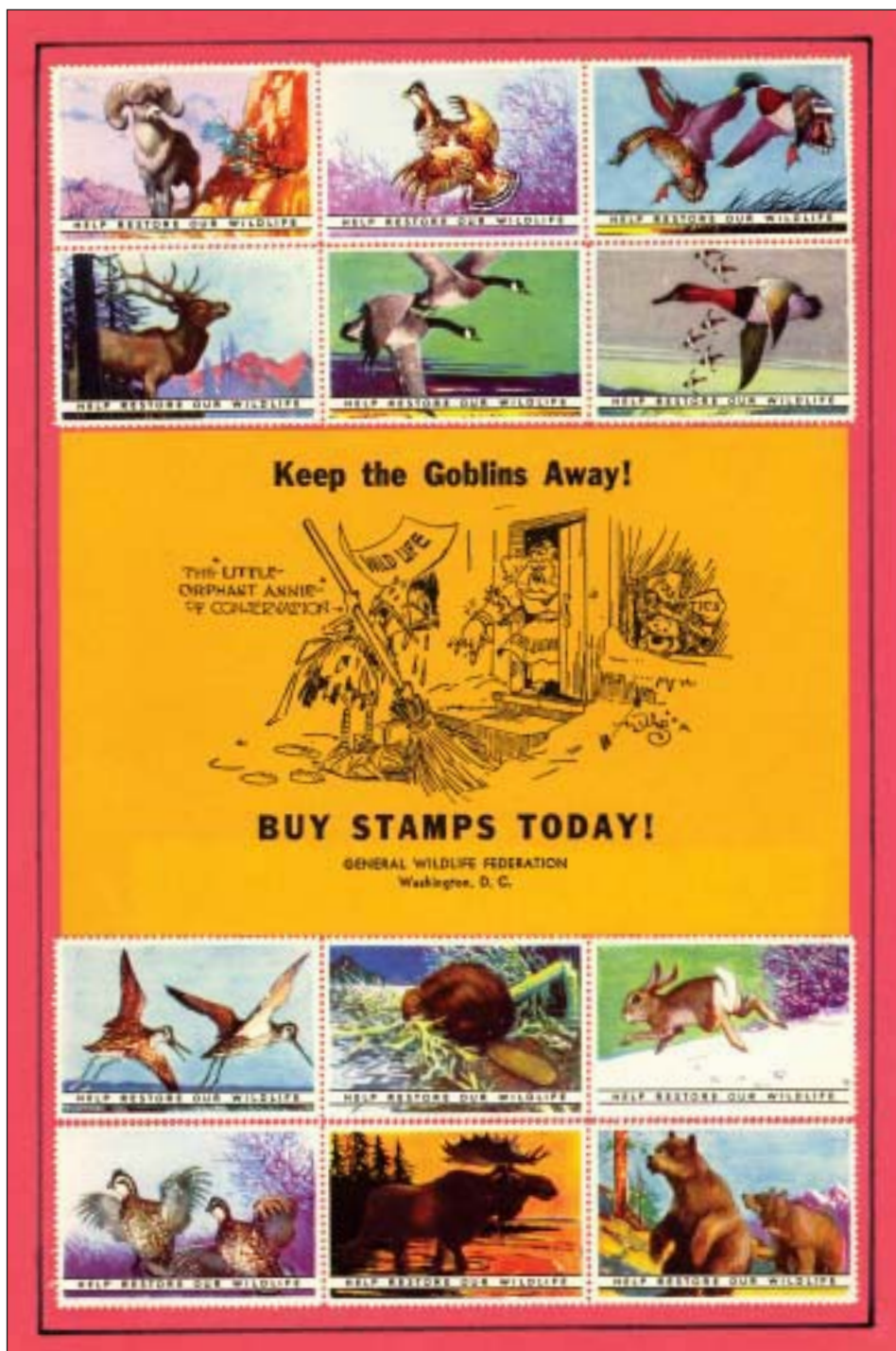
Pheasants were numerous along the boundary of the game refuge and we bagged seven. I shot my limit – all beautiful shots and dead shots at that.

I had a fairly successful season – bagging 53 pheasants and 15 Hungarian partridge.

**Friday, October 13, 1944**

Art is home on leave after almost three years in the South Pacific. I invited him and Ed to come out here for some hunting. They came by train to Williston and I met them there.

The three of us were shooting prairie dogs today just across the Little Missouri south of Watford City. We then went east of town and shot a few pheasants. I got only one. While I was having my license checked by a game



## OPENING DAY

Tuesday, October 1, 1940.

Opening day of hunting season. I went out alone in the morning and shot 3 pheasants and 2 Huns. Grassed a partridge with the first shot fired. Ev and I went out after school, about 3:45, and hunted until 5 o'clock along the State line. We brought in seven more pheasants.

Wednesday, October 2.

Evelyn and I ate partridge and pheasant at noon today in her apartment. There were three gun-shot casualties today - none were fatal. Bob Evans, who sold me my hunting license, shot himself in the shoulder. He stooped over to tie his boot lace, leaning on his 410 as he did so. In some way the gun was discharged and gave him a painful flesh wound.

LaMoure, Thursday, October 3.

Arrived here about noon and will work until some time tomorrow. At 5 o'clock I walked out just a short distance north of the

Court House and shot two cock pheasants.

Friday, October 4.

Shot two Hungarian partridges along Bone Hill creek south of Dickey this morning and later bagged a pheasant.

Saturday, October 5.

Elmer (Gessner), Evelyn and I hunted along the State line between 3:30 and 5 o'clock this afternoon. We brought in our bag limit of ten pheasants.

Sunday, October 6.

Elmer and I went out in the Dodge about 6:30 this morning and hunted for about three hours, using my gun as Elmer has none. I shot my limit, including a white cock which I shot on the south side of the State line just southwest of Ellendale. Elmer bagged four pheasants and a Hun.

George Aberle, Elmer and I went out for an hour this afternoon and saw very few birds. George got a hen pheasant and I bagged a Hun.





warden near Cherry Creek 3 mallards flew over Art and Ed who were a little distance away. Three shots and Ed had a greenhead and Art had two. He sure hasn't forgotten how to shoot the Winchester.

## 1946

The season on waterfowl, sharp-tailed grouse and pheasants opened October 5. There is no open season on prairie chicken, ruffed and sage grouse, Hungarian and Chukar partridges, and deer.

The only record I have of hunting in 1946 is bagging three pheasants near the Simonson farm and shooting one near Tom Palmer's place. I didn't go out on opening day for a very good reason – we had ten inches of wet snow!

Pinnated grouse (prairie chickens) are becoming extremely scarce in North Dakota and they are now on the protected list. The last yellow-leg that I shot was on opening day in 1941.

## November 27, 1948 (near Lakota)

Ed, Bob and I went out this morning to try our luck at deer hunting. About a foot of snow in the stubble fields and the temperature at zero. We met Jackie Geritz on the road a short distance east of the old Wamduska Hotel; he now owns the Wamduska farm. He told us to park the car over a hill and come back to the spot where we were as it is a natural deer crossing.

It was no more than done when we saw four deer in a stubble field north of the road and coming our way. We were in the south ditch and as the white-tails bounded across the road we had to move to avoid being run over. Ed got a fawn and I shot the doe. Bob hit a fawn twice, knocking it down each time, but it managed to get into a wooded draw where Fred Carpenter finished it off and tagged it. Bob got a doe in this area last year. These were the first deer for both Ed and me.

*Note: The scrapbook includes only one other entry that mentions deer hunting, an indication of the sparse deer population in North Dakota at the time. An avid hunter his entire adult life up to this time, Arnold Benson was 44 years old when he tagged his first deer.*

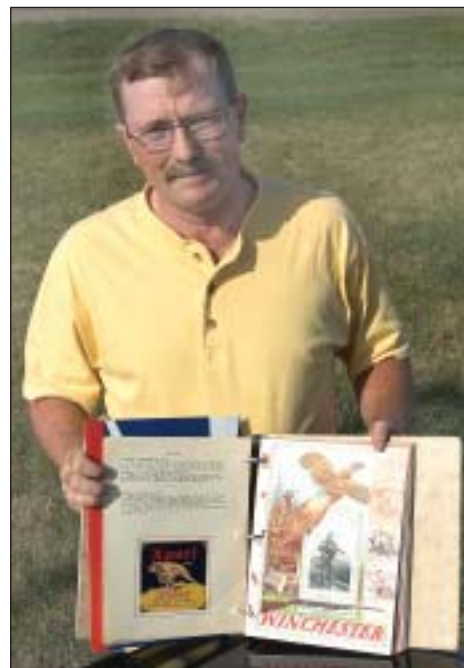
In September 1951, Evelyn Benson wrote a \$5 check for an antelope license, drawn on the First National Bank of Williston. We know this because the scrapbook contains the canceled check, a recreation of Evelyn's license for Unit 3, pictures of a dead antelope buck, and a label from a box of Remington 100 grain bullets in .250 Savage.

That's where the scrapbook ends – no details of the antelope hunt, no further entries.

Eighteen years after the first page, times were better. Ducks were back. Deer and pronghorn were on their way up. Pheasants and partridge were widely established game birds.

And Evelyn was writing a check for a permit, instead of Arnold putting shotgun shells on account at the local hardware store.

**CRAIG BIHRLE** is the Game and Fish Department's communications supervisor.



Mark Resner, Mott, discovered the scrapbook at a flea market several years ago.

